

HOUSING



All newly arriving members will be required to find housing on the local economy. One of the NSU Housing Officer's jobs is to help you find a house. Economy housing for large families may require a diligent search and you may have to stay in temporary lodging for 4 weeks or longer. We also have a Multi-National Support Center that can also assist with finding houses, etc.

You will receive both an Overseas Housing Allowance and a utility allowance to offset these costs. You can set up "standing orders" with your local US or German bank to pay your rent, utility, and phone bills automatically. This is an excellent system that makes bill paying almost painless.

Moving into a house on the economy can require some up-front payments because German houses don't usually come with all of the items that we would expect to be installed in a house in the US. These items may be kitchen cabinets, light fixtures, curtain rods, etc. The Housing Referral Specialist will try to help find you a house which already contains all of these items.

In this section, we're going to talk about family housing and living on the economy in a house that you rent directly from a German landlord. There are many differences between German and American style houses you may be used to, and what you can expect to find in them when you move in.

ELECTRICAL POWER

German electricity is 230 volts/50 Hertz alternating current versus the American standard of 110 volts/60 Hertz. If you have any question on whether or not an appliance will work here, look at the voltage label on back.

WARNING: 110V/60Hz appliances can burn out or be seriously damaged if they're plugged into a 240V outlet without a transformer or converter.

Most American appliances will require electrical transformers, adapter plugs and/or modification to operate properly. Transformers will be issued to you when you arrive (subject to availability). If you need more, they are expensive but available through the Thrift Shop at Schinnen or the local Shoppette. US-2-prong-to-German-2-prong adapter plugs are available at the Shoppette for about one dollar each. Adapters for grounded 3-prong plugs are also available. Radio Shack and AAFES sell voltage converters for about \$20 that are good for items that don't use timers, clocks or motors such as toasters, irons, and waterbed heaters. Here are some other good things to know about electrical appliances and consumer electronics.

Remember, transformers only convert the voltage, not the cycles (or Hz). Extended use of motorized items at a lower Hz than designed could degrade the motor. Also, transformers that are turned on use electricity, even when the device plugged into them is off. A relatively high voltage transformer that is operating uses as much electricity as a 60 Watt light bulb.

CLOCKS

Most American electric clocks and clock radios are built to run strictly on 110V/60 Hz power. They will run approximately 10 minutes per hour slow, so there's no reason to bring them. You can buy "dual power" (110V/220V) alarm clocks on the economy or at the PX. Schinnen sells a 110V/220V multi-alarm clock radio for about \$25.

TELEVISION AND RADIO

Typically, service members buy or lease American Forces Network (AFN) programming satellite decoder systems from AAFES while living on the economy. **At Kalkar, you can sign out an AFN Decoder from the U.S. Family Support Office, free of charge, for the entire length of your tour here.** Current programming provides ten AFN

TV channels. If you plan to get AFN, you will need the satellite system's special decoder plus the 80-centimeter dish. You will be responsible for installing the system (with your landlord's permission) and AAFES will not buy back a purchased system at the end of your tour. A US TV will work for AFN.

If you want to get European stations, you will need a PAL or multi-system TV and an external antenna. There is no cable TV system in Kalkar, so satellite systems are common. However, if you already own a satellite TV system, you will not be able to pick up the signals that are broadcast to North America. The German TV signal standard (PAL) is different from and not compatible with the US standard (NTSC). Further, some systems are broadcasting a digital signal while others broadcast an analog signal. A European satellite offers more than 50 English speaking channels.

KITCHENS

If you're moving into a new (or even a not-so-new) German house, the kitchen may be nothing but bare walls. Unlike Americans, Germans expect to custom-build their kitchens, even in a rented house. Furniture stores have large departments devoted to kitchens. Since you'll be getting appliances from the US government (refrigerator, freezer, washer, dryer, kitchen range, and dish washer), you won't have to spend anything on them but you'll need their dimensions in order to fill in everything else around them. Since this can be a big expense for a two or three year tour, you may be able to work out some kind of cost-sharing agreement with your landlord, however, the rent may not exceed a certain limit then. This is another prime area for using your Value Added Tax (VAT, a kind of sales tax) exemption. The Kalkar Housing Referral will try to find houses on the economy, which already have these items installed; however, the options are limited. You will get more information after you arrive.

LIGHT FIXTURES AND LAMPS

As with kitchens, Germans expect to select and install their own ceiling lights. Your house may already have some lights installed or there may just be wires hanging from the ceiling. If you shop around, you can get lamps at reasonably low prices and then have the VAT taken off of the price. Your lamps will work here. You will just need to use 240V light bulbs and plug adapters. Both the bulbs and the adapters are available at the Shoppette.

CLOSETS AND WARDROBES

Under German tax laws, a space with a door on it is a room; that makes a closet a "room." Since property taxes are based on the number of rooms and square meters of living space in the house, you can see why Germans don't want to have closets! So where do you hang your clothes? A wardrobe (called a "*Schrank*" (pronounced like "shrunk") in German). The government will issue you one per family member, plus one more. You can also buy them at local furniture stores and at AAFES furniture stores. You can buy clothing racks at our local Shoppette as well.

WINDOWS, CURTAINS, SCREENS, AND AIR CONDITIONING

Air conditioning is just about unknown in this part of Germany, especially in houses. It's not needed most of the year. When it does get hot and humid, people open their windows and use table, floor, or ceiling fans. You can buy fans here at our Shoppette. (Another popular place is the Saturday "flea market" at the Dutch town of Cuijk (pronounced "kuyk"), where you can buy new products at reasonable prices.)

Curtains are for decoration more than for privacy in many houses as most German houses are equipped with roll-down shades on the outside (called "*Rolladen*" or "*Jalousie*" in German). These *Rolladen* provide shade during the daytime along with privacy, insulation, and security.

Lace curtains are typical on the ground floor windows on the front of the house. Curtains can be pretty expensive on the economy but you can buy basic materials, including hanging rods and fixtures at the PX at Schinnen for much less. Mini-blinds are also very popular. You may also choose to wait until you get here; the previous residents of your house may have curtains or mini-blinds to sell. You can also order curtains or blinds by mail order.

We mentioned earlier that when it gets hot in the summer, folks open their windows. Unfortunately, window screens are not widely used here, so when you open the windows, say hello to flies and mosquitoes. Window screening material is available at local hardware stores. This is another good place to use your VAT exemption.

TELEPHONE SERVICES

You can bring your American style phones and purchase adapter plugs, or buy relatively inexpensive German phones here. Both cordless and with-cord American phones will work here. The cordless phone may need a transformer or voltage converter if the base unit has to be plugged into an electrical outlet and isn't already dual voltage. American cellular phones will not work here without replacing the computer chips inside. European cell phones are readily available, affordable, and very popular. Answering machines will also work with a transformer or you can buy 240V models locally.



Since it may take a while for you to establish telephone service in your new home, you have a couple of options for calling back to the US until that time. An inexpensive option is a "Go Bananas Card," which can be purchased at Lottery/Newspaper shops (there is a shop in Kalkar, located on the main square). They come in different amounts and can also be purchased at many different stores or at the German Officer's Club on the Kaserne. Another option is AT&T, Sprint, and MCI, which all have special toll-free numbers here in Germany that will connect you to their international long distance lines. You can use prepaid calling cards or join their military calling plans. You should be aware, however, that if you use a calling card you can be charged as much as \$1.25 per minute for a call to the US. The military calling plans cost somewhat less, but are still not cheap and there are better and cheaper options available.

Once you have home telephone service, calls to the US made through the German company Telekom are actually cheaper than through the biggest US companies (currently about 4¢ per minute with ISDN XXL or Active Plus service). The German telecommunications market opened to competition in 1998. There are a number of direct dial or call-back services that advertise in the *Stars & Stripes* and *International Herald Tribune* newspapers which charge 8¢ to 10¢ per minute. So, while you may want to have a calling card or accounts with one of the US companies for the period until you have home service, there are less expensive options available.

COMPUTERS, E-MAIL, ON-LINE SERVICES AND INTERNET ACCESS

Many personal computers and monitors are built to run on either 110V/60 Hz or 240V/50 Hz power. There is normally a power selection switch on the back of the case that lets you select the type of power that is available. Check your owner's manual. For some reason, many printers are not dual power, so you will definitely need to use a transformer for them. If you choose to keep your computer set up to run on 110V power, you should not have any problems running it on a transformer.

All American military personnel assigned to Kalkar have military e-mail accounts. Our accounts are located on a file server at Spangdahlem AB. Your sponsor should have given you his or her e-mail address in his or her first letter to you. E-mail is often the most effective way to communicate with your sponsor; if you have it, we encourage you to use it.

There are public on-line services available in Kalkar, of which T-Online, which is run by German Telekom, is the most used. Almost half of the families here have an account with T-Online. (AOL and CompuServe services are also available here and are very similar to what's available in the US and the screen text can be in English. DO NOT maintain your US account, however. The charges for calling back to the US are very high.) DSL service is also available in this area, and most providers now offer flat rates. More information is available when you get here.